




**MOOD:** 🤢 nauseated

**MUSIC:** KT Tunstall - Heal Over



standuponit  
 **standuponit**

<https://standuponit.livejournal.com/2009-01-27> 23:59:00

When Sheriff Leland died, his widow came to clear all his junk out of the office. I'd always liked Ruth Leland, in that way you like somebody you don't see often and never get to talk to much. She was an outsider like me--Sheriff Leland had met her at Texas A&M, and then they had one of those weird twenty-year-reunion courtships that led to her moving to Camber and marrying him. They had about ten years before the heart attack got him, which in some ways of looking at it is a lot of time, and in other ways, no time at all. She left Camber as soon after the funeral as she could, so the day she came to box up his personal stuff was the last time I saw her.

She didn't say much--she never did--but when she'd packed up the photos and the diplomas and certificates, she came over to the desk and touched the little statuette of Justice, with her blindfold and her scales, that Sheriff Leland had kept next to the phone. Mrs. Leland said, "Will you keep this?"

It was a funny way of putting it, not *Would you like this?* or even *I think he'd like you to have this*, just a simple, factual, yes or no question. And it's what I always think of when I remember Mrs. Leland.

I said yes, and Blind Justice is still right where Sheriff Leland put her. I'm looking at her now, and I'm thinking she's lucky to have that blindfold on. And I'm talking about her because it's saving me from talking about Alma Finnister, which is a pretty cheap and obvious ploy there, Travis. Cowboy up and get it down.

You know, I would've felt better if she'd been angry. Or if she'd been stubborn, the way she was this afternoon. But she wasn't. Alma Finnister was *grateful*. Because we were the adults. We could make it okay again.

Eli wasn't happy about it, but he couldn't keep her from talking. Couldn't keep her from confessing, and although I knew her parents weren't the Catholic type of Christian nut, there was something religious about the way Alma Finnister insisted on telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. She kept her hands folded in her lap and her eyes fixed on the wall

just above the door, like every picture I've ever seen of Joan of Arc.

In a funny way, the hardest part for her to admit was the part that wasn't about Vernon Weatherbee with his throat ripped out: why was she in the Sutter house with him in the first place? She went an ugly red that made her acne stand out in magenta and fuchsia, but she said, "He was my boyfriend."

"Everybody we've talked to says he was Peggy Marie Procnow's boyfriend," I said.

"He was my *secret* boyfriend," she said, and any other teenage girl would have rolled her eyes. "Mama and Daddy would have a fit if they knew I was even *talking* to a boy."

"And Peggy Marie?"

"Vernon said he couldn't hurt her by breaking up with her. He said when he graduated, he'd just let it die off. But he promised he'd write to me. Every week."

"Uh-huh," I said, and I guess I let too much of how I was really feeling into my voice, because she flared up like the Fourth of July.

"He did! He promised!"

"And that's why you were in the Sutter house," I said.

"Sheriff," Eli said.

But Alma was already talking. "We had to. There wasn't anywhere we could meet where somebody wouldn't see. And Vernon said it was okay because his father was going to fix the door on Saturday, so we were only sort of borrowing it. And we weren't going to damage anything. We just wanted to be *alone*."

"Vernon talked you into it," I translated.

That knocked a big dent in Joan of Arc, but she looked down at the table and nodded.

"Okay, honey," I said, because really, a little breaking and entering was the least of anybody's problems here. "Just tell us what happened."

"Well, we got in," she said. "Vernon had a flashlight and we looked around a little. It was really creepy, but it was kind of neat, too. So we sat in what we thought was the bedroom and we talked for a little. And then, um, Vernon kissed me. And I kissed him back." She lifted her chin, like Joan of Arc waiting for somebody to light the fire.

I thought some very nasty things about "Christian education," but I kept my voice gentle when I said, "Then what happened?"

I guess part of me had been hoping, even then, that she'd say, "then a one-armed man jumped through the window" or "then Vernon pulled out his Leatherman and started sawing." But she frowned, unhappy and puzzled and sick, and said, "I don't know. I just got so *hungry*."

"Alma," Eli said, and he was visibly alarmed, which is something you never want in a lawyer.

"I don't know!" Alma said. "I really don't. I was just so hungry," and she sounded dazed by it, even now. "So hungry and so angry, and then there was blood, there was blood everywhere, and Vernon was in the middle of it and he wasn't moving." Her voice rose and rose, and then she was crying, like Peggy Marie had been crying that morning.

I went out into the hallway; after a couple minutes, Eli came out to fetch Alma a Dixie cup of water.

"Insanity?" I said.

"What else can it be?" Eli said and went back in.

And that's the question, isn't it? The question I'm sitting here asking Lady Justice. Naomi came back from getting the Camaro photographed and dragged out of the ravine, and she said, "You know, laryngeal cancer is a hell of a way to go."

"Hunger," I said.

"And, well, you know the stories, don't you?"

"Which stories?"

"About Darlene McCormick's 'severance package,'" Naomi said,

with the most eloquent air-quotes I've ever seen.

It took a moment for the pieces to click together, and I felt my eyes go wide. "You mean . . ."

"Oh yeah," Naomi said. "And the way I heard it, Mrs. Sutter *knew*."

"That can't have made her very happy," I said and winced when my voice squeaked.

"Mrs. Sutter wasn't a very forgiving woman at the best of times."

"Hungry and angry," I said, echoing Alma Finnister.

"Not that Alma Finnister didn't have good reason to be angry at Vernon Weatherbee, but apparently she wasn't."

"No," I said. "She wasn't."

"But maybe," Naomi said softly, "Mrs. Sutter was."

I had a chill go straight up my spine like a cramp. "Naomi, you realize what we're talking about here is crazy."

"Crazier than a girl tearing her boyfriend's throat out with her teeth? Crazier than a man starving himself to death with a full pantry?" She shook her head. "I gotta go tour the county roads, Travis. You go home and get some sleep."

But I'm still sitting here thinking about Paul Sutter and Vincent Hollingsworth and holes in the world. And what do you do about justice when every version of the truth is crazier than the last? How do you make it okay? How do you do your job, Sheriff Villette?

Naomi was right. I need to go home. But I don't think I'm going to get much sleep.

**TAGS:** [down the rabbit hole](#)



This looks like a  
good idea.

...

This.

...

Little guy's not  
bad.

Gotta teach RHex  
to smear.

33 comments

 maki\_to13

January 28 2009, 05:09:09 UTC    COLLAPSE

O\_O

Just.....O\_O

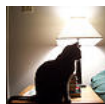


 standuponit

January 28 2009, 05:22:49 UTC    COLLAPSE

Thanks!

I had an iPhone and some really boring time to kill. And what's better than ghost stories, right?



 txanne

January 28 2009, 05:22:06 UTC    COLLAPSE

::shivers::

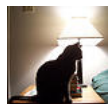


 standuponit

January 28 2009, 05:23:35 UTC    COLLAPSE

Just don't cheat on your wife or girlfriend in any abandoned houses and you'll be fine.

Ghosts are very specific. ::nods a lot::



 txanne

January 28 2009, 05:24:56 UTC    COLLAPSE

Okay! I can avoid doing that! Because abandoned houses are *creepy*.



 trolcatz

January 28 2009, 05:36:32 UTC    COLLAPSE

I'm going to fall asleep at work tomorrow and I'm telling Mom because it's ALL YOUR FAULT because I stayed up late to read this and nofreakin'way am I going to be able to get to sleep now.

January 28 2009, 12:45:48 UTC      COLLAPSE

January 28 2009, 05:39:41 UTC      COLLAPSE



I hate you.

Where's my chicken?

January 28 2009, 12:49:55 UTC      COLLAPSE



January 28 2009, 12:50:33 UTC      COLLAPSE



I hate you.

Where's my chicken?

January 28 2009, 12:50:43 UTC      COLLAPSE


January 28 2009, 12:51:38 UTC      COLLAPSE

January 28 2009, 11:54:55 UTC      COLLAPSE

A photograph of a natural rock arch in a desert landscape. The arch is made of reddish-brown sandstone and stands over a path. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant mountains.

January 28 2009, 12:48:38 UTC      COLLAPSE

January 28 2009, 15:45:51 UTC      COLLAPSE

 nearlymay

January 28 2009, 13:56:23 UTC COLLAPSE

Horray! I'm loving reading this story.

 cjtremlett

January 28 2009, 16:08:29 UTC COLLAPSE

Oooh, spooky and creepy! That was great stuff!

*Deleted comment*



 Ometotchtli

January 29 2009, 01:23:02 UTC COLLAPSE

Yikes--desolation dentistry. Cool.

 blackcoat

January 28 2009, 17:01:43 UTC COLLAPSE

See! See! This is what creepy overly Christian homeschooling does for you:

You don't know when you're being possessed and need an exorcism! Remember, kids: Catholic school is best!



 trollcatz

January 29 2009, 01:08:40 UTC COLLAPSE

You just made my wife facepalm. \*g\*



 blackcoat


January 29 2009, 04:35:17 UTC COLLAPSE

Thank you. Thank you. Try the veal, and tip your waitress

 stotangirl

January 28 2009, 17:16:38 UTC COLLAPSE

Really good story! And a good distraction from an otherwise crummy, crummy day, so thanks for ... um, putting an alter-ego through an even crummier one? Yeah. :)

(Hi, I've been reading your journal for a while--I think I got here through  matiociquala ...)



 standuponit

January 29 2009, 01:09:59 UTC COLLAPSE

Welcome! And nothing cheers a person up like, um, well, yeah.



 thistlewicche

January 28 2009, 21:46:02 UTC COLLAPSE


That was lovely and creepy and perfect!



 [calanthe\\_b](#)

[January 28 2009, 22:19:57 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Nice story. Took my mind off the weather for a bit--thanks!

 [edschweppe](#)


[January 28 2009, 22:50:43 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Wow. That's goooood.

If you ever got tired of law enforcement [1], you could make a living as a writer. Maybe not a great living - I don't know of many fiction writers who make big bucks - but enough to get by. And you've already got a built-in fan base!


[1] Or medically **retired** from law enforcement. It's not exactly the safest career in the country, after all. Even without Rosalie Sutter haunting your beat, as it were.



 [standuponit](#)

[January 29 2009, 01:11:33 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)


Nah, I've got my career all planned. I'm going to write cookbooks, remember?

 [nebula99](#)

[January 29 2009, 13:30:23 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)


You could write creepy cookbooks?



 [standuponit](#)

[January 29 2009, 13:31:50 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Like *The Transitive Vampire* for cooks!

 [after\\_nightfall](#)

[January 29 2009, 14:51:37 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Vampires, Math and cooking? I'd buy it.

(Great story, by the way.)

 [edschweppe](#)

[January 29 2009, 16:22:58 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)


Blood pudding for the vampires and stewed braaaaaains for the zombies?

 [nebula99](#)

[January 29 2009, 19:30:33 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

You must! I would totally read that (with all the lights on)



 alethea\_eastrid

February 3 2009, 02:05:01 UTC   COLLAPSE

...OK, I read that as "The Transvestite Vampire." \*blink, blink, blink\*

Long week(end)

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This looks like a  
good idea.

...

This.

...

Little guy's not  
bad.

Gotta teach RHex  
to smear.